

NO MORE STATIC

People In Glasnost Houses Shouldn't Jam Broadcasts

RICHARD W. CARLSON

In May 1987, the Soviet Union suspended jamming Voice of America (VOA) radio broadcasts in Russian and 10 other Soviet and Baltic languages. The halt in purposeful interference, coming four months after a similar end to jamming of BBC external broadcasts, has been hailed by many in the West as another step in Mikhail Gorbachev's "glasnost" campaign. But the shift in Soviet jamming policy should not be exaggerated. In clear violation of international treaties to which they are a party, the Soviets continue to interfere deliberately with certain foreign radio broadcasts.

Jamming is more concentrated than ever on broadcasts that might strengthen the cultural memory of peoples whose national identities the Soviets are trying to suppress. VOA broadcasts in Polish as well as the Afghan languages of Dari and Pashto are still being jammed. So are Hebrew and Yiddish broadcasts by Kol Israel, which help keep alive Jewish culture in the Soviet Union, and Russian-language broadcasts by Deutsche Welle, the West German radio service, which have a special appeal to the Volga Germans and the Baltic republics.

What is more, the Soviets have apparently intensified their full-scale jamming of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), U.S.-sponsored broadcasts to Eastern Europe and the USSR that specialize in political news and information about Warsaw Pact countries. About two-thirds of Soviet jamming historically has been directed at RFE and RL, which employ many Soviet-bloc emigres, and provide extensive news coverage of the countries to which they broadcast. At least two sky wave transmitters formerly used to jam VOA broadcasts have now been retargeted toward RFE/RL.

Nor is there any evidence that the Soviets have significantly reduced the extraordinary resources they devote to radio interference. A study by the BBC in 1985 estimated that the Soviets spend between \$750 million and \$1.2 billion every year to jam Western broadcasts, an amount several times higher than the combined annual budgets of the BBC, VOA, RFE/RL, Kol Israel, and Deutsche Welle. There have been no estimates to date of a substantial reduction in Soviet capital or operating expenditures devoted to jamming. (In comparison, the entire 1987 operating budget of the Voice of America, which broadcasts in

44 languages to more than 130 million people worldwide, was only \$169 million.)

As many as 15,000 technicians still operate an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 Soviet jamming transmitters in the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, using at least one billion kilowatt-hours of energy per year. This is slightly less than the annual residential consumption of electricity in Washington, D.C.

Since the Soviets are so aware of the power of words and have made propaganda a central element of maintaining control, it is no surprise that they are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to jam Western broadcasts. They fear the effect of an informed public opinion on the legitimacy of their regime and on the Communist Party power structure.

Western radio broadcasts are the closest thing to a free press in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. They provide information that Soviet authorities don't want their citizens to hear. Last August, for example, 5,000 people joined peaceful demonstrations in the Latvian capital of Riga to mark the 48th anniversary of the pact between Hitler and Stalin, which led to Soviet annexation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. VOA and Radio Free Europe had reported plans for the demonstrations; Janis Rozkalns, one of the organizers of the protest, claimed that "without the Western radio, we might have had 100 or 200."

History of Jamming

Frequency jamming has been used as an effective weapon since the early part of the century. During World War I, the Germans used a 5-kw (kilowatt) transmitter to interfere with telegram traffic between Paris and Petrograd. In 1926, Romania jammed Soviet broadcasts to Bessarabia. The Austrian government jammed Nazi German broadcasts in 1934. Each side in the Spanish civil war jammed the other's broadcasts.

During World War II, jamming became a significant instrument of military strategy. The Nazis blocked BBC broadcasts for political reasons; they also used jamming as a military weapon to interfere with radar installations along the English Channel. Italy and Japan also engaged in

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extensive jamming, and France jammed French-language broadcasts from Germany.

In contrast to the several nations that have resorted to jamming primarily in wartime, the Soviets have engaged in systematic peacetime jamming for 40 years, intensifying their efforts during periods of military intervention and political repression in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan.

The Soviets began interfering with Western broadcasts during the Berlin Blockade in 1948 and have been jamming intermittently ever since. In September 1959, when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev visited the United States, jamming of VOA and BBC was lifted; selective jamming resumed soon after he returned. Jamming of VOA and most other Western broadcasters was suspended in 1963 about the same time the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed. But five years later, massive jamming was resumed with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The initial meetings in Helsinki of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1973 saw a general relaxation of interference with VOA, BBC, and Deutsche Welle broadcasts, although jamming of Radio Liberty continued unabated. Soviet internal and external crises such as the rise of Solidarity in Poland in 1980 and the invasion of Afghanistan caused the electronic curtain to close again.

Technology of Interference

Jamming, the deliberate, harmful interference to a radio signal in the audio spectrum, is accomplished by intentionally broadcasting irritating noise, sounds, or programs on or near the same frequency as the broadcast to be blocked. There are three basic methods of doing this, and the Soviets use all three.

Ground wave or local jamming has varying effectiveness depending on the location and power of the jammers, the signal strength of the incoming broadcast, and even the quantity of structural steel in surrounding buildings. The Soviets use more than 2,500 ground wave jammers; we know from the identification signals that Soviet engineers use to monitor the effectiveness of their jamming, that the Soviets have placed jamming stations in every Soviet city with more than 500,000 people, and in recent years have moved as well to many cities with populations as low as 100,000.

Sky wave transmitters bounce jamming signals off the ionosphere, at an angle calculated to return them to earth hundreds or even thousands of miles away in the same general location as the foreign broadcast. Sky wave jamming has a much larger "footprint," that is, covers a much larger sector in the broadcast target area, than ground wave jamming. The Soviets may have as many as 250 sky wave jammers, including a cluster of transmitters near Leningrad that can place an electronic curtain over most of the southern half of European Russia.

Although sky wave jammers are more powerful than ground wave jammers, their efficiency is affected by atmospheric conditions. They may be subject to "twilight immunity" in the early evening hours: changes in the ionosphere after the sun has set make it difficult for jammers in the east to interfere with radio broadcasts from the west, where it is still daylight.

The third method of jamming is for the Soviets to cover

a Western broadcast signal with one of their own domestic radio programs. This interference, while less effective than the electronically produced "white noise" emitted from ground wave and sky wave jammers, enables the Soviets to deny they are jamming.

The Soviets have been so intent on blocking Western radio signals that they have become a victim of their own jamming. Their jamming transmitters are so powerful that at times a deafening roar overtakes frequencies used for

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their own broadcasts. Soviet jamming also affects radio transmissions in countries thousands of miles from its target area. VOA engineers estimate that 60 percent of radio transmissions in specific bands in Africa have been affected by stray Soviet jamming.

Getting Through the Curtain

Despite Soviet jamming, Western broadcasts, VOA, BBC, RFE/RL, and Deutsche Welle enjoy wide audiences. More than 32 million people in the Soviet Union and the Baltic republics, and another 30 million in other parts of Eastern Europe listen to Western broadcasts on a regular basis (once a week or more), and one-third of all Soviet adults tune in to Western radio on an occasional basis. In times of crisis, such as the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, this figure rises dramatically.

In Poland, where jamming is intensive, 59 percent of Polish adults still listen to RFE regularly. VOA broadcasts on medium wave (or AM band), which are not jammed, also draw a large audience (48 percent).

In spite of the heavy jamming of shortwave frequencies, the Soviets rarely interfere with medium-wave broadcasts. While shortwave frequency assignments are rather dynamic, often changing with every season, medium-wave assignments are fairly constant. They're scarcer, and, hence, more valuable to national broadcasters. Interference with AM broadcasts, which is much more obvious, might have greater political ramifications than shortwave jamming. It appears that the Soviets jam only those AM broadcasts that might inflict the most damage—in Poland, only RFE/RL is jammed on the medium wave.

The effectiveness of jamming is difficult to document. Since jamming of BBC broadcasts was lifted in January 1987, their audience has increased an estimated 16 percent;



In Gdansk, Poland, Solidarity leader Lech Walesa listens to Radio Free Europe as his wife Danuta accepts his 1983 Nobel Prize for Peace in Oslo.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

similar increases in listenership are expected for VOA and others. Meanwhile, jammed stations and regional broadcasts in Eastern Europe are losing some listeners as a result.

Some of the smaller regional broadcasters such as Radio Finland and Radio Sweden, which concentrate primarily on entertainment rather than news programs, already have noted dwindling audiences, partially as a result of better Soviet entertainment programming. On this front, the Soviets have become increasingly sophisticated. Realizing that most listeners to Western broadcasts tune in between eight and midnight (with highest numbers listening at 11), they have begun programming rock concerts on radio and first-run movies on television at these times to draw listeners away. Both VOA and BBC have Friday and Saturday evening rock music programs targeted to Soviet youth; the USSR has begun its own music shows to air at the same time. To counter the popular VOA Russian "Night Owl" program, which is aired from midnight to one, the Soviets have recently tried their own version of this political commentary and news feature show.

Jamming may be one of the most insidious means of depriving citizens of information, but it is not impenetrable. VOA often receives reports of listeners, in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, who travel from their urban homes to the countryside to listen to Western broadcasts. Outside the range of ground wave jammers, the faithful

listeners record the programs and bring them back to share with friends and neighbors. But perhaps the most ingenious evasion of jamming allows listeners in Afghanistan to hear programs in their native languages, albeit a few weeks late. VOA Pashto and Dari Service broadcasts are taped and the cassettes are sent to mujahideen groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere. More than 2,300 tapes were distributed in 1986, informing and inspiring untold numbers of freedom fighters.

Elena Bonner, wife of the Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, in her 1985-86 trip to the United States, recounted to VOA officials how she and her husband would listen to the Russian Service news broadcasts at the top of each hour. The interference would be so bad that they could only catch words here and there, which they would write down. At the end of the day, by putting all the sentences together, they could gain a rudimentary idea of news from the West.

Listeners have often been persistent and ingenious in their efforts to pierce the electronic curtain. One VOA listener claims that covering his shortwave radio with a wet towel filters out the irritating jamming noises. In Libya, some have reported that putting their radios in aluminum stock pots is effective. In Afghanistan, where broadcasts are not jammed in the early morning, the devoted often arise at four to listen to Western programs.

Soviet Audience

The Soviets have always directed their most intensive jamming at the non-Russian nationality languages—Armenian, Azeri, Belorussian, Dari, Georgian, Kazakh, Pashto, Tatar, Tajik, Ukrainian, and Uzbek, as well as those of the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Broadcasts in English, which pose little threat because usually only the Party elite speak the language, are rarely jammed. In fact, many senior Soviet government officials rely on Western broadcasts to stay informed; there have been reports that at least one Russian broadcast frequency was left open for the use of high-ranking Party members.

Overwhelmingly, Soviet emigres and travelers to the West say their primary reason for listening to Western broadcasts was the desire to obtain accurate news about the world and the Soviet Union. Other reasons included: moral support, contact with the outside world, inadequacy of the Soviet media, and desire to hear a foreign point of view.

RFE/RL's May 1987 "Monthly Summary of Listener Reactions to Voice of America in the USSR" provides some good examples of why people listen. One respondent stated that he "would much rather tune in Western radio than read Soviet newspapers. VOA's news, commentaries, and programs such as "American Press on the USSR" are my main source of information on the world and USSR." Another states: "VOA is very important to me because it talks about human rights in the USSR boldly and truthfully. Before VOA, I had no idea that people in other countries had more rights than Soviet citizens!"

The second greatest reason Eastern bloc listeners tune in to Western broadcasts is entertainment. The largest audience (more than 100 million people) for any regular international broadcast in history belongs to VOA's "Music

USA." The jazz program host, Willis Conover, is better known than most American statesmen, and when he travels to Eastern bloc countries, such as Poland, thousands of devoted fans greet him. Conover's impact cannot be overstated. Scores of jazz museums in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe credit "Music USA" with introducing them to the uniquely American music.

In his recently published memoirs, *In Search of Melancholy Baby*, the Russian writer Vassily Aksyonov called jazz "America's secret weapon number one." Now living in exile in Washington, Aksyonov wrote that the "Music USA" broadcasts of his youth "made for a kind of golden glow over the horizon when the sun went down, that is, in the West, the inaccessible but oh so desirable West."

Conover's popular English broadcast jazz program has never been jammed. The allure of jazz has transcended the barriers of a closed Soviet society and has resisted Stalinistic efforts to mold popular tastes. In fact, jazz is one of the most popular forms of music in the USSR, perhaps more so than in the United States.

Violated Treaties

Jamming directly violates numerous international treaties and regulations to which the Soviet Union is a party. Specifically, jamming violates:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948: Article 19 advocates the "right to freedom of expression and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers."

- Article 35 of the 1982 International Telecommunications Convention: "All stations, whatever their purpose, must be established and operated in such a manner as not to cause harmful interference to the radio services or communications of other members."

- The Final Act of the 1975 Helsinki accords: "The participating states . . . make it their aim to facilitate freer and wider dissemination of information of all kinds."

The International Frequency Registration Board (IFRB) issued a report at the 1987 World Administrative Radio Conference that fully documents, for the first time, Soviet jamming practices. The IFRB concluded that the Soviets prior to May 1987 were using 37 short-wave frequencies in the USSR, Czechoslovakia, and Poland to jam VOA and RFE/RL broadcasts.

Open the Air Waves

There appear to be some internal calls for opening the air waves. Alexander Bovin, a prominent journalist, wrote in the April 16, 1987 *Izvestia* that he hoped "the time of the 'jammers' is coming to an end." Vitaly Korotich, editor of the Soviet magazine *Ogonyok*, echoed Bovin in remarks before the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on April 22, when he openly expressed that he believed that jamming would halt. Shortly thereafter, it ceased against VOA transmissions to the USSR.

The Soviets had already stopped jamming the BBC's vernacular broadcasts on the eve of British Prime Minister



VOA's Willis Conover is greeted by fans during a 1984 trip to Warsaw.

Thatcher's trip to Moscow in January 1987. When that policy was greeted with favorable response, enhancing Gorbachev's public image, it set the stage for further cessations of jamming.

In the past, the Soviets explained they jammed Western broadcasts as a service to their citizens. Khrushchev stated in a television interview during his 1956 visit to the United States that the Soviets jam in order to prevent their people from getting a false view of Americans.

The Soviets have argued at the Helsinki conference and followup sessions that they have the right to jam because: governments have the right to control information from abroad; Western radio broadcasts are subversive instruments of psychological warfare designed to incite rebellion within the Soviet bloc; and Western radios are manned by "traitors, deserters, turncoats, and former Nazi flunkies and renegades."

These charges are feeble, especially in light of the massive and systematic campaign the Soviets have conducted against Western broadcasts for the last 40 years. Despite Soviet rationalizations, jamming violates the fundamental human right of free expression, and is a confession of internal weakness.

Although we welcome the easing of interference directed at VOA broadcasts, the Soviets should not be rewarded for simply not breaking the law. We expect the Soviets to adhere to the basic tenets of human rights, including the fundamental right of freedom of expression.

If the Soviets are sincere about reform they should cease jamming all broadcasts and be willing to compete freely and fairly in the international marketplace of ideas. As proof of that sincerity they should immediately dismantle each of their jamming stations, thereby eliminating the temptation of turning them back on as soon as it suits their political interests.

BOOK REVIEWS

What to Read on Nicaragua

An annotated bibliography by Mark Falcoff

Since 1979, the number of books on Central America available for the English-speaking reader has increased more than fivefold, and the number on Nicaragua almost tenfold. To some degree, the publishing industry has followed the national debate. In 1980 and 1981 most books on Central America dealt with El Salvador; today most address Sandinista Nicaragua.

As any visitor to a bookstore will quickly discover, the vast majority of these books support the Sandinista regime or, at a minimum, are hostile to U.S. policy. Since 1984, books have begun to blur distinctions about the conduct of the Sandinistas at home and to concentrate almost exclusively upon the sins, real or imagined, of the Nicaraguan resistance forces. Many titles make no pretense to objectivity, much less commitment to democratic values as we understand them. This is true for products not merely of small, left-wing houses but also of many mainstream imprints such as Adriana Angel and Fiona Macintosh's *The Tiger's Milk: Women of Nicaragua* (Henry Holt and Co., 1987), a glossy coffee table production full of lush photos and lurid prose. (According to the authors, the Sandinistas are not merely bringing education and health to the poor and needy, but "open[ing] a space to [Nicaraguan women] to realize their potential as never before.")

A typical product of small presses is Ron Ridenour's *Yankee Sandinistas: Interviews with North Americans Living and Working in the New Nicaragua* (Curbstone Press, 1986). Chapter titles include "This Is My Revolution, Too," "Jesus Would Be Happy in Nicaragua Today," "I Was Always a Rebel," and—the *pièce de résistance*—"Jailers with Compassion." Connecticut residents may be interested to know that the flyleaf of this book announces that its costs were partly underwritten by the Connecticut Commission on the Arts, "a State agency whose funds are recommended by the Governor and appropriated by the State Legislature."

While on Nicaragua—as on several highly controversial topics—there appears to be some informal censorship at work within the community of book publishers and editors, it is also true that the market for Latin American books in the United States is a "left" market, and in providing the titles they do, publishers are responding to eco-

nomic logic. They are driven to some extent by orders from university bookstores, where courses on Latin America tend to be taught in the United States by leftist or Marxist academics. Nonetheless, some very good books have been published on Nicaragua, many of them quite useful in understanding the current situation and often rich in materials for supporters of the democratic resistance. Few are available at ordinary bookstores; however, most of them can be acquired through the mail or by special order at full-service bookstores.

History

For those interested in the background to U.S. involvement, the essential book is Neill Macaulay's *The Sandino Affair* (Duke University Press, 1985). This book, which covers the period 1912-36, is particularly valuable in fleshing out the personality and role of the man after whom the Sandinista Front has taken its name and should be read together with Richard Millert's *Guardians of the Dynasty* (Orbis Books, 1977). *Guardians*, which carries the story forward from 1936 to nearly the end of the Somoza dynasty, focuses upon the creation of the National Guard and the rise of the Somoza family; though critical of the U.S. role, it also provides a balanced assessment of the U.S.-Somoza relationship. Among other things, it shows that the United States intended a wholly different outcome in creating the National Guard; that the elder Somoza benefited from the new doctrine of automatic recognition of "revolutionary" governments that the Latin American states had forced upon the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations; and that, in fact, over the years the Somozas often carried out their plans over heated U.S. opposition. Above all, *Guardians* shows that the United States never "installed" the Somozas in power, a myth the Sandinistas and their American supporters never tire of repeating.

Two recent books illuminate the later period of the Somoza regime. Joshua Muravchik's *The Uncertain Crusade: Jimmy Carter and the Dilemmas of Human Rights Policy* (Hamilton Press, 1986) and Robert A. Pastor's *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Princeton University Press, 1987) reveal from very different perspectives the way the Carter administration—working at cross-purposes with its own stated goals—undermined Somoza without successfully engendering an acceptable democratic replacement. Pastor, a former official of the Carter National Security Council is now adviser-in-residence on Latin American affairs at the Carter Center

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